

## **Mentor's review of Dorota Błaszczyk's BA thesis "Ethnographic study of interethnic and intergender relations at K-pop parties in Wrocław, Poland"**

Dorota Błaszczyk's BA thesis on K-pop parties in Wrocław offers a valuable contribution to the academic study of the social dynamics of interethnic and intergender relations at K-pop events in Poland, but with some reservations. While the thesis demonstrates many strengths, it also exemplifies several shortcomings.

In relation to the former, the student shows proficient command of theory which she skilfully uses for the interpretation of ethnographic data, as well as in the literature review section(s). Further, and as related, she is also able to critically assess many complex issues pertaining to intergender and interethnic social relations at K-pop events, including the role of prejudices (on both Polish and Korean sides) as well as some of the power imbalances (e.g., patriarchy) in these interactions. Moreover, the student proficiently utilizes thick description in her analysis, laying out different emic perspectives on the main issues of the study (although less so for the Korean men's perspective, see below). Plus, I have to compliment her on the exemplary usage of vignettes in the thesis, as well as on her keen discussion of the methodological limitations of the study. These are the strengths, but there are also weaknesses, as related to methodology, interpretation, and structure.

First, and regarding methodology, there is only very general and vague discussion of methodology, which leaves out some of the most important methodological particularities for the understanding of the study. For example, the student writes she conducted one and a half year of fieldwork, without specifying how many events she attended, how long were these events, what were perhaps some of the differences between them, some methodological problems, etc. Similarly, with online data analysis, it is unclear how many and which websites, platforms, and forums she analysed, how she approached these tasks, what kind of sampling she used, etc. She also leaves out the specifics regarding the number of interviews she did, and more importantly, how they were distributed regarding the categories of age, gender, ethnicity, and fandom participation, how long were these interviews, etc (only in the conclusion of the thesis, she briefly mentions she interviewed 7 people, but not from which categories). It would be important to know in this relation how many Korean men were interviewed, and how long were these interviews, and similarly for K-pop Polish female fans, how many of those were interviewed who were actively engaging in participatory cover dances at K-pop events, and how many with others. This information is central for the understanding of generalizability of some of the most relevant claims in the thesis. Let me offer two examples. On page 41, Dorota writes that "*most* of the Polish fans [women] did not [expect] Koreans to be present when they first attended the K-pop party, which suggests that the desire to establish relationships with them was not the primary reason for participation [emphasis added]" "Most" Polish fans can in this case be read as *most* attending the events, but in reality, it represents only *most* of those who were interviewed (on the side of Polish women). If the student interviewed 3-4 Polish women (?), "most" would mean 2-3 of them, which can hardly be generalized to the "most" of all of the women attendees, but the passage reads as generalization, and it tries to convince the reader that the Polish girls don't come to K-pop parties for hooking up with Korean men (at least not as a "primary" reason, as it is stated).

Another example on page 41 reads as follows: “*Koreans at the events* seemed more initially interested in establishing relationships with Polish women, but it was often the idea of what they could achieve at the event rather than actively pursuing this goal. Interestingly, *none* of them admitted to being a fan of K-pop, and all were more passive listeners of the genre [emphases added].” The same question is relevant here regarding sampling size and generalizability. It would be important to know here exactly how many Korean men did the student ask about these issues (i.e., about the motivations for coming to K-pop parties, and if they are K-pop fans), in order to properly understand this statement (and therefore if these are views and motivations pertaining to few individuals, or as something more general; the analysis itself reads as a generalization). As I understand, there was probably one long interview and one shorter conversation being conducted with two Korean men (one of them in the club), and there was a language barrier involved?

This leads me to another methodological problem, which is the importance of emic perspective regarding people that are most discussed in the study. In this regard, I have an impression that there was not enough attention given to the position of Korean men, to their motivations and aspirations, their relation to K-pop, and to the context and their experiences of living immigrant lives as a minority population in a Polish society (and this is also another power imbalance, apart from patriarchy, which should also be discussed in the thesis, but is not). Without proper understanding of all these contextual and (sub)cultural factors, it is also difficult to understand the nature of Korean men’s attendance of K-pop parties in Wrocław. And apart from a few brief statements about their motivations by two Korean men that we can read in the thesis (by Hugo and Seonwoo), most of the interpretations of their actions come from outsider perceptions of Polish women and men, and some from Dorota’s on-site observations. In this way, we get enough direct information to understand some of these interactions might be problematic, but not enough to understand how much of these pertain to normal rituals of fandom participation, minority socialization, and interethnic courting behaviour (and to learn more about these types of interactions themselves).

These are not only methodological problems, but also problems of interpretation. For example, I was wondering how to understand the opinions cited in the thesis by Polish women and men about Korean men attending K-pop parties that the latter have a fetish on white/Slavic women with blonde hair, without knowing anything about Korean men’s ideas on this topic or about their actual dating patterns in Poland? And how to understand all the other interpretations that we have read/heard before? And finally, this also leads to questions of bias. For example, there are some problematic arguments uncritically reproduced in the thesis by some Polish journalists, which the author of the thesis takes for granted without questioning, for example, regarding Martyna Jersz’s statement that “South Koreans do not seem willing to integrate into Polish culture” (69), or Sobańda’s claim about the contrast between Polish and South Korean people, the former supposedly being more resisting, and the latter more conformist (69), or regarding the student’s own view about the “lack of openness that characterize Koreans” (78). Certainly, these are ethnic/racial stereotypes that would need to be critically unpacked, and accompanied by some contextual analysis.

Furthermore, I need to mention another problem of the thesis, which are its structure and length. The thesis is 80 pages long (without bibliography), but it should be 50/55, and structurally, the last chapter is quite redundant, as it brings back some of the issues from the previous chapters, while it is also very ethnographically thin (as it offers very little

ethnographic evidence, apart from a vignette). Therefore, this chapter could easily be shortened and integrated within other chapters of the thesis, which would also solve the problem of the length (and the final Discussion section could also be merged with Conclusions). But all this relates to another problem, of a more processual nature, which is that the student left too much work for the end, and was then not able to address all of the problematic issues before submitting the thesis.

To sum, while it is pertinent to foreground some of the strengths of the thesis (e.g., theory, parts of analysis and thick description), it is also important to acknowledge some of its weaknesses (e.g., methodology, interpretation, structure). Currently, I am not certain which of these sides carries more weight, therefore I can only suggest a provisory grade for the thesis at this time (grade between 2/3), and I would like to state my final assessment after the student's defence.

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